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Congress Extends Temporary Unemployment Program

OLYMPIA – The Washington State Employment Security Department will be ready to pay unemployed workers who benefit from Congress' decision today to extend temporary unemployment benefits to jobless workers nationwide.

The bill approved by Congress will continue the Temporary Extended Unemployment Compensation (TEUC) benefits program through the end of the year. TEUC provides additional federally funded benefits to claimants whose regular state unemployment benefits run out. President Bush is expected to sign the bill by May 31. Currently, about 1,700 new individuals in Washington State qualify for TEUC each week.

While the new legislation will extend the enrollment period for TEUC benefits, it will not offer any additional benefits to the long-term unemployed who have already exhausted all available unemployment benefits programs. An additional 800 individuals continue to exhaust all their benefits each week.

The new legislation will have the following effects:

- The TEUC program will not end on May 31 as originally written. Unemployed workers who exhaust their regular benefits any time between now and December 27, 2003 will be able to file TEUC claims. New TEUC claimants will receive application instructions as needed.
- In most states, the bill provides up to 13 weeks of TEUC. However, claimants in states with high unemployment rates, including Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania, qualify for an additional 13 weeks.
- The legislation provides a "phase-out" period for individuals who have not used all their TEUC benefits by Dec. 27. They will be able to continue to make claims and receive payments on the existing balance through April 3, 2004. But those who exhaust their first 13 weeks of TEUC benefits after Dec. 27 will not be eligible for the additional 13 weeks.
- *The bill does not add benefits for individuals who have already used up their TEUC eligibility.* However, some of those workers are able to receive benefits through other state and federal programs.

The legislation does not affect other unemployment programs in Washington, including Extended Benefits. Extended Benefits became available in Washington in January 2002 as a result of the state's sharply increased unemployment rate. It provides up to 13 additional weeks of additional benefits, although many claimants receive nine weeks after regular and TEUC benefits are exhausted. Funding for these benefits is split between the state and the federal government.

The state's WorkSource centers provide resources to help people in their search for work. For locations and a searchable job database, see the WorkSource Web site at <http://go2worksource.com>. For more information about TEUC and Extended Benefits, visit <http://go2ui.com>.

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